



# Health Services

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

## Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors

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Christina R. Ghaly, M.D.  
Deputy Director, Strategy and Operations

313 N. Figueroa Street, Suite 912  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Tel: (213) 240-8101  
Fax: (213) 481-0503

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*To ensure access to high-quality, patient-centered, cost-effective health care to Los Angeles County residents through direct services at DHS facilities and through collaboration with community and university partners.*



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December 15, 2015

TO: Chair Hilda L. Solis  
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas  
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl  
Supervisor Don Knabe  
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

FROM: Mitchell H. Katz, M.D. *Mitchell Katz*  
Director

SUBJECT: **REPORT BACK ON THE EXIDE BATTERY RECYCLING PLANT IN THE CITY OF VERNON (ITEM #S-1 AND #18, OCTOBER 27, 2015 AGENDA)**

On October 27, 2015, the Board instructed the Department of Health Services (DHS) to lead the review to look at data mining and information from private and non-profit clinics and organizations to determine whether there is a trend in developmental disabilities in the communities near the Exide Technologies battery recycling plant (Exide).

### Background

Exide operated a lead smelting battery recycling plant in the City of Vernon. The Vernon plant has been in continuous operation since the 1920s and was taken over by Exide in 2000. However, Exide failed to meet the upgrade requirements necessary to meet compliance of Federal and state air quality and safety standards. Thus, the Exide plant was subsequently ordered to shut down its operations in 2014.

The plant, which was in operation for nearly a century, produced a significant amount of emissions with known long-term health risks such as lead, benzene, 1,3 butadiene and arsenic. Lead has been found in residential soils in Boyle Heights, Huntington Park, Maywood, and Vernon, which pose a continuing risk of lead exposure. The concern raised in this motion is that chemical pollutants such as lead generated by the plant in these communities may contribute to developmental disabilities, a large and varied group of diagnoses and conditions where behavioral, physical, and cognitive learning are impacted and have a variety of causes ranging from genetics to exposure to environmental toxins to other causes.

### Assessment of Current Available Data

Over the period of time that the plant has been in operation, there has been an increase in the number of children found to have developmental disabilities across the United States. Part of this increase is due to better detection and diagnosis. However, the etiology of the increase is generally thought to be greater than just better detection and the exact causes of the increase are hotly debated.

In our attempt to identify what data could be used from private and non-profit providers for this purpose, we note that there is no comprehensive or standardized data set available that tracks the conditions and diagnoses that fall under the global term "developmental disabilities" in the area surrounding the Exide facility. Second, while some organizations have data on the number of clients that have a diagnosis of developmental disability, there is tremendous variability in the diagnoses and codes used by different facilities. Unfortunately, providers would not have the key data on exposure to the toxins i.e. length of time of exposure, degree of exposure, exposures at different sites such as home, school or parks, etc. At this point, I would recommend that we focus our efforts on identifying children with developmental disabilities in the area impacted by the Exide plant and getting them the appropriate services.

### **Next Steps**

Currently, DHS, DMH and DPH are jointly developing a community outreach program to meet the County community-centered priority action items of: 1) rapid testing of residential properties; 2) facilitation of cleaning of contaminated home interiors; 3) assessment of industrial and commercial areas and; 4) provision of access to medical screening for early detection of diseases that were discussed at the October 27, 2015 Board meeting.

Preliminary discussion around screening for developmental disabilities has occurred between DPH staff and the area schools. DPH will be working collaboratively with the schools in the impacted area to develop an enhanced screening program for cognitive, learning, and behavioral disorders in children living and/or schooling in these communities. This will yield a more unified, searchable and analyzable database of current and future diagnoses of the spectrum of developmental disability disorders and enable the schools and Regional Centers to determine the optimal interventions and treatment for these children.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me or Dr. Alexander Li, DHS Deputy Director at (213) 240-8344 or Dr. Cyrus Rangan, DPH Director, Toxicology and Environmental Assessment.

MHK:al/cr

c: Chief Executive Office  
County Counsel  
Executive Office, Board of Supervisors